

HOW THE CIA SMUGGLED SVETLANA OUT

STATINTL

By BLITZ Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI: Delhi-based CIA agent Robert F. Rayle, who master-minded the defection of Svetlana Stalin and escorted her to Rome, is back in Delhi. He is the Second Secretary in the American Embassy here.

To the already embarrassed External Affairs Ministry, his return is bound to add a fresh irritant.

EXTENSION

New Delhi's embarrassment arises from the fact that Svetlana Stalin came to India on an invitation from Dinesh Singh, former Minister of State for External Affairs and now Minister of Commerce.

Svetlana, who arrived in India on December 20, was mostly staying at his paternal estate at Kala-

kankar and at his residence in New Delhi.

She was to have returned to the Soviet Union earlier but an extension was given on request. Naturally Dinesh Singh is greatly mortified over the incident, which has momentarily clouded Indo-Soviet relations.

PREPARATIONS

The day preceding the secret flight by a Quantas plane, Svetlana left the Minister's residence for the Soviet Embassy quarters.

It is, however, naive to believe that the CIA contacted her at the Soviet Embassy quarters during the few hours that she was there and made all the preparations for the dramatic escape.

Svetlana, escorted by Robert F. Rayle, went to the Palam airport a few minutes before the Quantas flight from Sydney landed, on March 6-7 night.

Before they arrived, a small

contingent of Americans headed by Dennis Blee of the US Embassy had taken positions in the lounge around the BOAC counter. BOAC is the Quantas agent in India.

It was the CIA man Rayle who bought two air tickets for himself and Svetlana for New York though the Quantas flight was for London via Rome. Rayle bought his ticket in rupees and Svetlana's in dollars.

He was, however, short of dollars. The shortfall amounting to over Rs. 100 was made up in Indian currency. This is a palpable violation of the rules.

From the booking counter, they moved into the Customs and Immigration enclosure. But none of them, least of all at the Immigration counter, whose in-charge that night was Piara Singh, pondered over the strange spectacle of a lone Russian woman in the company of about 10 Americans.

DISPOSED

They passed muster and were about to proceed to the tarmac but the aircraft developed trouble. The one-hour delay caused jitters to the Americans, especially Dennis Blee who was in charge of the task force.

The anti-climax came early next morning when the State Department disposed what the CIA proposed. The American Embassy here, at the instance of the CIA, gave Svetlana asylum.

But before she could take off from Rome, the State thought it was too hot a potato and dropped it, with the result that the CIA had to find at the last minute a plane in Switzerland.

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